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# Healing Racial Injustice with Mindfulness Research, Training, & Practice

Danielle "Danae" Laura
*Lesley University*, dlaura@lesley.edu

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Danielle "Danae" Laura

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Dr. Melissa Jean and Dr. Andrew Olendzki

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I dedicate this thesis in loving memory of my peer Abdirauf Abdullahi

A peaceful, smart, young Black man who was killed his summer after high school

May our current generation build more safety and well-being for future generations

**Abstract**

This thesis offers a collection of authors and studies in support of improved research, training, and practice connecting mindfulness with racial justice through intergroup applications. The paper identifies barriers at work (e.g., colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bias) in contemplative science, Western Buddhist communities, and secular mindfulness centers, which block the sizeable contributions possible in studying the intergroup application of mindfulness practice—specifically Lovingkindness Meditation, among others—when used as an intervention with anti-racist aims. Through secondary qualitative research, I reviewed six key works from Black authors on mindfulness and race, as well as six sample studies on the prosocial benefits of mindfulness, mindfulness for racial healing, and mindfulness for the African American community. My findings are that the six key works from Black authors can be used in tandem and that these authors are due sizable professional acknowledgement. This thesis suggests that, for racial justice, there is an interconnection between intergroup research, studies for racial healing, and studies safely incorporating the needs and participation of Black participants, as well as other stigmatized groups. I ultimately propose that mindfulness studies has a foundation to build upon with forms of measurement and models that are ready for application and improvement if only we move beyond the hyperfocus on the individual benefits of mindfulness for white people.

*Keywords:* mindfulness, lovingkindness meditation, white supremacy, racism, applied contemplative studies

# Contents

*[T]his is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, ... that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it.*

*—Baldwin, The Fire Next Time*

*To grow up in America is to grow up with racist ideas constantly rained on your head, and you have no umbrella. and you don't even know that you're wet because those racist ideas themselves cause you to imagine that you're dry. Then, someone comes along and says "you know what you're wet and here's an umbrella" You can be like, "thank you. I didn't even realize I was drenched"... This is why I don't think people should feel ashamed. There were other ...very powerful people...a history that was constantly raining those ideas on your head. Let's say you're a white American with racist ideas and you've perpetuated those racist ideas...you were simultaneously a victim and a victimizer.*

*—Kendi*

*Do we wish to live forever with white supremacy and white fragility?*

*—Larry Ward, America's Racial Karma*

**Healing Racial Injustice with Mindfulness Research, Training, & Practice**

The United States is home to a racial hierarchy that puts Black people at the bottom and white people at the top. Anti-Blackness operates in several ways, most formally via structural racism, which presents in "housing, education, mass media, wealth/jobs, and criminal justice" (Rose, 2015, 00:14:03). General references to mindfulness in academia and public discourse tend to offer mindfulness practice as a way to ameliorate racism due to its efficacy for fostering compassion, plus this cultural association of mindfulness and compassion causes assumptions to be made about spaces where mindfulness is practiced and researched as areas innocent of perpetuating racism. The fact is that even within mindfulness spaces – including research studies, Western Buddhist communities, and secular centers – anti-Blackness affects the type of research that is performed (individual instead of intergroup), the relationships that falter, and the ways that Black practitioners are regarded in the field. Numerous Black mindfulness and yoga practitioners, in both Buddhist and secular spaces, express the need for increased racial literacy within the communities where they practice (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Manigault-Bryant, 2016; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016). To address the misconception that mindfulness spaces do not perpetuate racist structures and behavior, it is helpful to highlight certain areas of current research and redirect mindfulness studies' focus from individual benefits to intergroup benefits.

The field's research interest in the individual benefits of mindfulness reflects the values of our individualistic culture in the United States. Often, individualism upholds racist structures because it does not account for the experiences of others. Friction exists between the self-perception, reputation, and cultural assumptions of the mindfulness studies community, and the reality of how racism plays out in the space. This contrast detracts from efforts that are needed to

respond to systemic racism. The lack of celebrated Black researchers and funded intergroup research, as well as the Western mindfulness communities' struggle to support and maintain students and staff of color, call for attention as a crux of racism, when even the spaces that are expected to be compassionate and "safe" instead demonstrate the ways that structural, and other forms of racism, infiltrates all areas of our society, including liberal and spiritual.

Despite the gap in overall mindfulness studies research on the benefits of mindfulness for reducing racism, in recent years, a few outstanding researchers have studied these powerful intergroup applications. This literature has looked at mindfulness as an intervention for variables related to implicit bias, explicit discriminatory behavior, and the interaction of the two (Bankard, 2015; Biggers et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2014; Lueke & Gibson, 2016; May et al., 2014; Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2010). This thesis summarizes results from some of the literature on this topic, representing in depth experiential findings (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016) and contemplative science studies, to draw much needed attention to the current existence of overlooked tools that are ready to be applied, and honed, in support of racial justice.

This paper will delve deeply into the core models presented by an elite group of Black authors writing on mindfulness and race, who I refer to as The Canon (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016). Each of us has our own self narrative of race. Before reviewing the models and contributions of The Canon, I begin my thesis with my personal narrative of race and racism. I cover my experience with segregation and diverse classrooms and with starting to notice white spaces, as well as seeing structural violence and how I experienced the desegregation of my own life. Following my story, I introduce The Canon through a reparative process of naming each Black author. Raising up these authors in this

particular academic space is an essential part of this paper. Each of their concepts and models includes specific ways for mindfulness studies to uplevel our practice in service of the greater community and to dismantle systems exhibiting white supremacy. Following the key contributions of The Canon, I exhibit the work of a significant group of scholars who exemplify applications for contemplative studies in the areas of prosocial behavior (Bankard, 2015; May et al., 2014), reducing race-based implicit bias towards Black people (Kang et al., 2014; Lueke & Gibson, 2016), and health-benefits for African Americans (Biggers et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). By combining the work of The Canon and this selection of studies, which is just a sampling of the small but burgeoning sect of contemplative scientists daring to apply mindfulness to intractable social issues, I provide a birds-eye view of the field and prospects for this particular intersection of mindfulness and race.

## Key Concepts in US American Racism and Mindfulness Studies

Anti-Blackness occurs through the dehumanization of Black people by implying they are threatening (Bargh et al., 1996; Payne, 2005; Payne et al., 2002; Rudman & Lee, 2002) and less human which triggers certain emotions and fear responses in the brain. Examples of anti-Blackness can be seen in human resource recruitment (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005), police gun behavior (Correll et al., 2002; Sim et al., 2013), body language during conversations (Mc-Connell & Leibold, 2001), and distrust towards Black people (Stanley et al., 2011). In this paper, when I refer to contemplative science, I am including the academic field of study, as well as the secular mindfulness centers and Buddhist communities where in depth study and practice is also occurring. On the topic of mindfulness and race, it can be theorized that the field of contemplative science inadvertently suffers from colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility,

and implicit bias. These barriers impede progress. Within the field of mindfulness studies, these four factors cooperate to deter prosocial and pro-Black behavior.

The selection of Black authors, referred to as The Canon, write about mindfulness and race, specifically inviting the masses to embrace mindfulness as a tool to address racism, and to engage peers in the field of contemplative studies to turn towards the topic of whiteness to better understand what is holding the field back from its true potential. When I use the term white supremacy in this paper (Martinez, 1998; Okun 2016), I am referring mainly to the political ideology that for example embedded slavery, then Jim Crow and then Mass Incarceration into the foundation of our past and present society (i.e. the social systems that privilege white people). While anti-Blackness and white supremacy are the central problem, colorblind ideology is a prominent barrier to reducing structural racism against Black people because it negates the importance of seeing and naming how this specific population is being treated differently, and specifically how they are being mistreated (Rose, 2015). Alongside colorblindness, there are three other barriers to addressing anti-Black racism: spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bias. All four operate as a support for not only structural racism, but also three other forms of racism that impact the lives of Black people in the U.S. "individual/internalized," "interpersonal," and "ideological" (King, 2018; Mendoza, as cited in Acosta, 2020, p. 197).

One theory of how racism functions is that colorblind ideology is a primary, but not singular, way that white supremacy occurs, and we can apply this to understand how it occurs within mindfulness studies. According to Rose (2015), "Colorblind Ideology includes the belief that only the absence of accounting for race will bring racial equality. Also, it includes rejecting all racial record-keeping, and...relies on the idea that race no longer matters." While colorblindness occurs in all parts of society -- secular, religious and spiritual -- a very particular

style of behavior called spiritual bypass occurs in spaces, even secular ones, that engage with ideas of spiritual evolution. The concept of spiritual bypass was introduced in the 1980s and is defined as "the tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks" (Clark et al., 2013). Alongside colorblindness and spiritual bypass, white fragility is a term that summarizes a set of internal reactions and external behaviors that white people experience when interacting with a person of color, and in particular, while discussing the topic of race (DiAngelo, 2011 as cited in Menakem, 2017). Finally, implicit bias is a set of beliefs stored in the emotional center of our brain, responsible for our external decisions and behaviors, even ones that may contrast our stated values (Greenwald et al., 2009). Not only are these barriers present in the field of mindfulness, but they in fact interact to reinforce white supremacy and reduce progress towards racial justice (King, 2018; Magee, 2019).

In order to restructure the current racial hierarchy in the U.S. for coming generations, we need to observe how different forms of racism interact, how key barriers to addressing racism function, and how the forms of racism and barriers to addressing racism can be accounted for in the field of contemplative science. The field of mindfulness studies has great promise for intergroup, and specifically anti-racist, studies if only we begin to counter the norms put in place by our culture of white supremacy. Currently, we are underutilizing the field to study: benefits beyond the individual, benefits for emotional regulation and quality cultivation to apply towards Black people, and the health benefits of individual practice for Black people.

Structural racism is allowed to remain unchanged and is reinforced, when colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bias frequent a space (Clark et al. 2013; DiAngelo, 2011 as cited in Menakem, 2017; Greenwald et al., 2009; King, 2018; Rose, 2015). Increased

racial literacy within the communities where Black mindfulness and yoga practitioners practice would mean adopting an ongoing attitude of learning as well as beginning to understand forms of racism (e.g. internalized, interpersonal, ideological, institutional) and the barriers to addressing racism (e.g. colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bias). Rose (2015) defines structural racism as "the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics -- historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal-- that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color" (Rose, 2015, 00:15:35). Some researchers consider "institutional" and "interpersonal" racism to fall under the umbrella of structural racism (Rose, 2015), and others consider them to be separate forms of oppression, alongside "individual" and "ideological" racism (Mendoza as cited in Acosta, 2020, p. 197). The more we study the topic of mindfulness and race, including the interaction between our internal states and the stories we have been told about Black people, the more likely we are to learn how racism functions and how mindfulness can intervene.

With roots in Buddhist psychology from Asia, mindfulness has been around for millennia, yet contemplative studies and funding of research on this topic in academia is far more nascent. As it currently stands, racist ideology persists within contemplative studies. According to Magee (2016), "the way the field of contemplative science has failed to be socially just up to this point lies in the voices and faces that go unheard and unseen in the field, as well as the topics that are either not studied, or, when studied, are under-celebrated." As mentioned above, there are barriers to addressing racism, and regardless of general good intentions, without active efforts to dismantle racism within the field and counteract colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bypass, the fear-based functioning of our brains will continue to run the show.

Within mindfulness studies, the barriers mentioned above reinforce current systems of white supremacy by shrinking the volume of Black researchers celebrated for their work (Magee, 2016), by limiting the number of studies performed on intergroup, specifically anti-racist, applications of mindfulness (Magee, 2016), and by reducing the number of studies performed to benefit Black people (Biggers et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2010). If our goal as a field is diversity, belonging, inclusion and equity, we must consider what impedes this goal, by learning how colorblindness reinforces structural racism, spiritual bypass permits white supremacy, and mindfulness studies supports brain and behavior changes which could be applied towards culture change. This thesis covers content from recent books and studies on the topic of mindfulness as a tool for racial justice. Before I introduce The Canon and the studies, and later share suggestions for future research, first, I share my story so readers can understand my positionality as a researcher.

**My Story**

My own pro-Blackness rose out of a family that struggled in different ways to show leadership in the face of white supremacy. I was initiated into the American norm of favoring whiteness through my schooling in white suburbs and my white-identified family, raised to identify as white by a Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Filipina single mother. My father is Irish and Polish. My mother had been groomed by her Caribbean parents to subconsciously identify with whiteness to assimilate. Roadtrips from the white suburbs to Jersey City were also part of my youth, where my Irish paternal grandma would welcome us with tea and coffee cake. My grandma owned her home in what, over time, became a Black neighborhood after white flight. Nevertheless, my grandma did not participate in the popularized pattern of white flight, and

instead set down deep roots. To this day, her house is owned by my Aunt Joan who checks on her neighbors the way my grandma did.

When my mother remarried, and we moved to Massachusetts, I remember being asked by my white third grade classmates if I was Native American, which was the closest I ever came in my youth to being named something other than white. It was not until a homework assignment in sixth grade Spanish class when we were introducing our "flags," or nationalities, that I learned of the non-European flags of my ancestry. I made my first Black friend in that class, and instead of labeling me "Latina/x" she called me "the World." That friendship blossomed into decades of immersion in Black culture, here in Boston, throughout the U.S., and abroad in Ghana, West Africa. Today, I acknowledge my white cultural and physical presentation, and I continue to learn how to embrace my BIPOC identity while recognizing, and learning to leverage, my white privilege and white adjacency for anti-racist aims.

I am committed to racial justice as a person of color who was raised to identify as white, and who grew up living and being educated in predominantly white spaces. I was raised less to deny my own heritage, and more to be oblivious to the ways white supremacy had informed the dismantling of my mother's family and our cultural identity as Caribbean and Asian American. In place of these ethnic identities, I had been offered a seat at the table of whiteness. In grade school, while identifying as white, I encountered what I thought was my first exposure to race when meeting students of color. Every school day, in pursuit of a quality education denied to schools with majority non-white students, my few peers that were students of color took a long bus ride to Concord, Massachusetts from the segregated neighborhoods in Boston where families of color had been directed to reside. As a child I thought, for the first time outside of my

Grandmother's neighborhood, I had encountered non-white people thanks to the the bussing

program at my school.

**Race-Based Segregation, Diverse Classrooms, and Noticing White Spaces**

These early experiences informed my interest in participating in my high school's club

"Unity," my police department's first restorative justice circles, my school's play "Ragtime," and

the Martin Luther King Jr. scholars program at New York University (NYU) where I studied

social justice and education. Although my worldview was still through a white lens, I began to

settle into non-white spaces with an ever-expanding ease that not only felt like home, but also

made me increasingly aware of all-white spaces. Even though the bussing program added

students of color to the white school population, the desegregation effort still left the classroom

population majority white, with dispersed students of color making up an estimated 1-4 students

per class. For college, I attended NYU with the hope of more diversity in my classrooms. The

diverse experience I craved existed within my MLK Jr. scholarship seminars, and I relished it,

but throughout my other courses, I noticed that people of color were more prominent in service

and security positions on campus than as peers in my courses. Once again, my class rosters were

majority white. One exception was that, due to my area of study – social justice and education – I

encountered a great number of Black professors, and in some cases, Black deans. At NYU, my

dream of a diverse educational atmosphere was still limited by majority white spaces, and in

particular, majority white student bodies.

During high school, I had also begun practicing yoga at a local studio. Similar to my

desire for diverse academic classrooms, I yearned for bodies of color to be practicing on the mats

beside me while in yoga studios. By college, I was aware of racial injustice due to housing

segregation and unequal access to quality education, yet I was still unaware of a great deal of the

working components of racism. Aside from being a person who had come to be at greatest ease and joy when surrounded by bodies of every color, I also hoped that yoga, which had personally benefited me greatly, could be shared with all bodies for its healing components. Yet, during college, even in my New York City, East Village, donation-based yoga classes where I practiced almost every day of the week, there were less than a handful of students of color in each class where the roster sometimes rose to as many as fifty people practicing together. In other words, it was another predominantly white space. Ultimately, I needed to study abroad and attend the University of Ghana to achieve some semblance of a non-white-dominated peer-based student experience.

**Seeing Structural Racial Violence and Desegregating Everyday Life**

While home for school break during my senior year of college I learned tragic news about one of the students of color, a member of the bussing program, who had been a freshman at my high school when I was an upperclassman. I read in my local newspaper about his death due to gun violence, and a case of mistaken identity. He was a Black student who had successfully graduated from Concord Carlisle High School with a full scholarship to college, and within weeks of graduating, before attending a single day of university, he had been shot and killed. At the time, while I still knew very little of all there is to know about racism in the U.S., I knew immediately that this peaceful and scholarly Black man died by gunshot close to his home as the result of the conditions of racism that place Black people in vulnerable, and more often violent, environments due to housing, education, and employment discrimination as well as their violent portrayal in mass media and the criminal justice system (Rose, 2015).

Upon graduating from college, I applied for a grant that would provide the foundation for additional fundraising in the name of my peer, and with the hope of having conversations about

race in my hometown. Two Black friends of mine who had attended my high school offered to help, one of whom I was still close to from that sixth grade Spanish class and one who, years earlier, had introduced me to the meaning of Caribbean pride. Together, we joined forces to fundraise and host conversations about race. Upon reflection, now in my thirties, it was this fundraising project, and a love of salsa dancing that desegregated my life upon returning home from New York City to Concord after graduating from college. Without these variables, my post-college work and social life would have been consistently redirected towards white worlds, whiteness, and white privilege. Instead, due to desegregating my social life, I have been continuously exposed to new experiences, new cultures, and new knowledge about the daily life challenges of people of color – in particular, Black people.

In my mid-twenties, I moved to Colorado for a short stint, and upon returning to Massachusetts, when choosing where to live, I considered Roxbury, one of the Black neighborhoods of Boston. My willingness to live in a majority Black neighborhood as someone who was raised to identify as white was significant due the history of segregated housing in Boston, and our country as a whole, as well as the violent images that have been shown of Black people committing crimes at a higher rate than white people. For example, a show like Cops, which was banned after twenty years on air, brought violent images of Black people into living rooms across the country for decades (Rose, 2015). For me, as I considered living in Roxbury, I knew the neighborhoods were full of families and working people, some struggling, some holding their own, or even thriving in the face of racist discrimination and ongoing segregation. Also, I knew that while the segregated neighborhoods in Boston were a place where families of color had been encouraged, and in many cases, forced to reside, they were no less a home.

Soon after moving into my apartment in Roxbury, my upstairs neighbor who was a Black cab driver from Somalia introduced himself to me and made sure I knew to contact him if I ever needed something. More than once while I lived there, he drove me to the airport and refused to charge me because it was his gift to me as his neighbor. While living there, one evening seven of our cars had their tires slashed. For me, it was helpful for there to be more than one car involved since it reassured me that I was not being targeted somehow. All of my neighbors were Black. One person accused our neighbor of slashing my tires and she insisted that she had seen him do it. The neighbor who was accused resisted the accusation and was summoned to court.

At the courthouse, we were informed that the man accused had two strikes on his record and that he was being told by the judge that if he did not confess and pay for my damages, that he would be jailed as his third strike. They had cornered him with the faulty criminal justice system, and yet I witnessed him speak up for his integrity and confirm that, while he had misstepped in the past, he was on a new path, and had not in fact committed the crime. Originally, I had planned to not respond to the court summons when I received them in the mail, since I thought perhaps they could not charge him if the property owner were not there to accuse him, but ultimately I attended the hearing to clarify that I was not accusing him of the crime. I told the judge that I had no reason to believe that he had committed a crime.

Then, as the security ushered us out of the room and into the hallway, they did all they could to keep us apart. Although I was not yet studying mindfulness academically, I knew that the distance being created between that man, my neighbor, and myself would leave room for both of our minds to make up fearful stories, or yield to the age-old myths that have been planted in our minds for hundreds of years about white and Black people. I wanted his mind to make up

as few stories as possible about me, and I wanted to give my mind as little fodder as possible to make up stories about him. Across the hallway, I asked his name. In case he would accept it, I did my best to offer him eye contact, a smile and a nod. I wanted to connect with him if he felt safe enough to do so, although I understood he had every reason to be distracted or unable to connect with me. We exchanged names, and brief acknowledgement.

Months later, I was walking down my lowlit block at night, returning from a nearby dinner party, and it was raining. A Black man walked towards me with an umbrella covering his face. When we were within a few feet of each other he lifted his umbrella to make room for me on the sidewalk, with his arm straight overhead. I saw my neighbor's face from the courtroom hallway, and we both smiled. He welcomed me under the umbrella. We stood there, just chatting. As I returned to my apartment, my insides beamed knowing that the very fear I had intended to disrupt had been tested and disrupted through familiarity and connection. A dark street with a Black man, a prevalent fear-based myth in America, had become a welcome place in from the rain by our having proactively addressed the racism in our minds. Ultimately, all of the research I have done at Lesley University, and for this thesis in particular, is dedicated to spotlighting the amazing qualities and contributions of Black people to American culture and as members of communities across the United States. On a daily basis, in the face of mistreatment, Black people use their heart and ingenuity to seek connection and build understanding; the authors of The Canon exemplify this truth.

**The Canon**

I entered the Lesley University Mindfulness Studies program in 2017 having tasked myself to study the intersection of mindfulness and racial justice. With the rise of state sanctioned murders of unarmed Black people by police captured on smart phones and made

visible via social media, I wanted to know how, if at all, mindfulness could address anti-Blackness and redress white supremacy for the masses. The book *Radical Dharma* (williams et al., 2016) was released the year before I entered school, and its release marked the beginning of a wave of work produced by Black authors on the topic of healing racial injustice via personal and interpersonal body-based practices, including mindfulness (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020).

In the years to follow, *My Grandmother's Hands* (Menakem, 2017), *Mindful of Race* (King, 2018), *The Inner Work of Racial Justice* (Magee, 2019), *Love and Rage* (Owens, 2020), and *America's Racial Karma* (Ward, 2020) added depth to the conversation launched by the *Radical Dharma* authors (williams et al., 2016). In 2020, as we entered the COVID-19 pandemic, and witnessed the heightened period of global calls for racial justice that accompanied the murder of George Floyd, Menakem's (2017) book began to top bestseller lists due to its specific focus on healing trauma in Black, white and police bodies. Within this thesis, I center six Black authors' books as The Canon in my analysis of how to heal racial injustice with mindfulness. These authors have the utmost authority from their unique combination of racialized experience, professions, and mindfulness practice.

This section will delve into the core models presented by The Canon. Their authority on mindfulness practice and their individual fields combines with their unique lifelong experience of race and having a Black body within a culture of white supremacy to offer a great deal to the field of mindfulness (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016). While funded scientific research in laboratory formats allows us to further analyze and popularize results from mindfulness practice, it cannot be over emphasized that the premise of mindfulness is self-study, over time, with keen observation, and with the mind-body

as its own laboratory of sorts. For this reason, meditation practitioners with decades of practice

contribute to the field of mindfulness studies on par with the academic research, and in a way

that is no less valuable.

**Peer-Reviewed Studies in Support of The Canon**

In this thesis, I include an overview of peer reviewed studies, including: (1) studies on the

effects of mindfulness and loving kindness meditation (LKM) to benefit society (Bankard, 2015;

May et al., 2014), (2) studies on the topic of using mindfulness to foster racial healing (Kang et

al., 2014; Lueke & Gibson, 2016), and (3) studies considering the wellbeing of Black people as

beneficiaries of mindfulness practices (Biggers et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). While the

academic literature will substantiate the works of The Canon, the overall thesis will aim to

centralize and deeply analyze the offerings from The Canon on the topic of healing racial

injustice using personal and interpersonal body-based mindfulness practice (King, 2018; Magee,

2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016). I believe their voices to

be central to the discussions about race currently occurring explicitly and implicitly in all homes,

schools, workplaces, and beyond.

**Accrediting The Canon: A Reparative Practice**

At the International Symposium for Contemplative Studies, Rhonda Magee (2016)

presented to an auditorium of fellow contemplative studies researchers about racism, and the

need to combine contemplative science with social justice. When presenting to her

contemporaries Magee requested that the audience recognize, "how [underrepresentation] is a

systemic process...social justice is about how some people are systematically included,

recognized, and valorized, and others are not." Magee notes that it is rare in this increasingly

popular field of mindfulness studies for the topic of intergroup applications of contemplative

science to be studied. To be exact, at the time, only dozens out of tens of thousands of studies focused on intergroup applications. Of the intergroup studies that do occur, few are celebrated, promoted, or applied (Magee, 2016). Magee is a champion for contemplative science that researches intergroup outcomes, and she implores the audience to ask: "why haven't we been [researching this already]?" and "what role does the homogeneity of the field, the whiteness of the field, play in the fact that intergroup outcomes have been under-researched?" Questions like this are essential for moving the field forward. For mindfulness researchers, internal inquiry requires looking at how the studies are being designed, who is benefitting from the studies, and what is driving the erasure of certain applications.

Some research and researchers are celebrated and others are not. Via publishing their work, The Canon challenges us in a positive way, inside and out of mindfulness studies, to acknowledge their work, their theories, and themselves as researchers. The premise of the slogan "say their names" in the Black Lives Matter movement is to honor and remember the loss of each individual Black life that is lost to police killings, instead of the individual's name being denigrated, forgotten, or ignored in the collective memory. Alongside police killings, there are countless forms of violence, harm, and hardship that Black people face due to our country's historical and present racist practices. One such theme of harm incurred due to racism includes Black professionals' work being discredited, underacknowledged, and/or barred from access to renown. Due to the historical and present racist practice of discrediting or under-acknowledging Black people, I have named the subject headings of the following sections with the names and titles of those that make up The Canon. This act of centering names is intended as a reparative practice since Black professionals endure far greater trials due to discrimination as they work to reach the same pinnacles of success to which white people strive. In recent years, this collection

of books on the topic of race and mindfulness has entered the public sphere and with this section I introduce significant frameworks from each offering.

***Reverend angel Kyodo williams, Dr. Jasmine Syedullah, & Lama Rod Owens***

Reverend williams, Dr. Syedullah, and Lama Owens produced their book via oral tradition; the final product was the transcription of numerous conversations (williams et al., 2016). At the time, they did not live in the same state, so each conversation involved traversing terrain to arrive in a single location, to talk together face to face. The takeaway from their book is an invitation to bring the topic of mindfulness and race, along with lessons learned from the book, into the reader's community of choice. I will show that this call to conversation as an expression of internal mindfulness practice is representative of what each and every work from The Canon calls us to do. The invitation is twofold: (1) come together in conversation about race and (2) have an ongoing, personal, body-based practice. In short, show up for conversations about race, and come prepared (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016).

**Cultivating Interiority for The Third Space.** In their book, williams et al. (2016) name what they call "Third Space," an experiential location "[which] emerges when radically inhabiting the two: the inner and outer paths towards liberation" (p. xxii). The authors assert that through conversation we have the opportunity to create a unique space where our inner work can be exercised via words and actions. Their book encourages us to consider what it would be like to have these very conversations within our own communities, which is anywhere within our individual spheres of influence. The teachings of their book are about surrendering as we befriend our internal experience, while in conversation, in order to transform into a more aware self. Unlike the rest of The Canon, williams et al. (2016) include an exploration of gender and

sexuality in their work. While other authors do not refer to this directly, it is deeply relevant to the broader theme of body-based liberatory practices espoused throughout each Canon text. In *Radical Dharma*, they fuse the importance of "cultivating interiority" with the power of showing up imperfectly with our communities to have conversations about white supremacy; finding that third space to learn where we are ignorant or aware, and passive or active about the issue of race (williams et al., 2016, p. 109).

   **Radical Dharma Five.** Four years after the release of *Radical Dharma*, in his book *Love and Rage*, Lama Owens (2020) succinctly summarizes the foundational theory from his work with williams et al. (2016). According to Owens (2020), there are five components of radical dharma, including the "contemplative approach," the "embodied approach," the "liberatory practice," the "collective practice," and the "prophetic praxis" (p. 4). The first component (contemplative) means training our minds with focus and lovingkindness in order to relate with thoughts and emotions. The second (embodied) is for moving beyond mental training to relate with our bodies, physical, yes, but also emotional bodies, energetic bodies, and communal bodies. The third part of the radical dharma five (liberatory) is developing knowledge of what it looks like and feels like to be free. The fourth (collective) is the "receiving and sharing (of) care" to acknowledge our interdependence (Owens, 2020, p. 4-5). Finally, the fifth component of radical dharma (prophetic) is a combination of seeing and telling the truth alongside the belief that "we can get free with strategy and effort" (Owens, p. 5). The radical dharma five involve mental training, body-based methods, coming to know freedom, expressing/receiving care to fortify interdependence, and the power of prophecy. Williams et al. (2016) offer a great model with their work *Radical Dharma* while heavily emphasizing personal practice and conversation.

*Ruth King, Clinical Psychologist*

King (2018) writes from a background in clinical psychology, organizational consulting, and her decades of Buddhist practice. She refers to racism as a "curable heart disease*"* and, like williams et al. (2016), emphasizes the importance of individual and interpersonal practice to address "individual and group racial identification" (King, 2018, p. 1; p. 23). King (2018) introduces her concept of "stars and constellations of suffering" as well as her framework, the "hindrances to racial harmony" (p. 50; p. 45). Her framework is an example of a tool that could be used in the very conversations williams et al. (2016) challenge us to have. King (2018) sees white ignorance as something that is quantifiable the same way she sees racism as curable. King finds that high amounts of white ignorance correlate with the greater likelihood that a white individual will feel compassion for the individual suffering of any given person, which she calls a "star of harm" (King, 2018, p. 50). According to King (2018), decreased white ignorance can be observed as a white individual begins to feel compassion for the collective suffering of a racial group, seeing an entire "constellation of harm" (p. 50). She warns against the over-celebration of people, in secular mindfulness communities for example, who exhibit a great deal of compassion for individual suffering when and if they have yet to understand the greater systems that contribute to racial suffering (i.e. becoming racially literate). To King, white ignorance decreases the more white individuals and groups attune their heart to the larger picture of racial suffering, when, instead of feeling compassion for one person, individual suffering can spur insight about patterns of violence towards Black people, for example.

**Six Hindrances to Racial Harmony.** Not unlike the Buddhist theory of hindrances to inner peace (greed, aversion, sloth, restlessness, and doubt), King (2018) lists "six hindrances to racial harmony" (p. 45). The first hindrance is "white people, good individuals" referring to

white people's attachment to being perceived as good (p. 45). The second hindrance is "internalized oppression," which is "when subordinated groups internalize the beliefs of the oppressor and, in turn, use these beliefs against themselves and other subordinated races" (King, 2018, p. 47). When white people see "stars of harm" instead of "constellations," they are exemplifying the third hindrance, blindness (p. 49). The fourth hindrance is when white people perceive "intent" as more valuable than "impact" (p. 52). "Battle fatigue" experienced by "subordinated groups" is the fifth hindrance (King, 2018, p. 57). Finally, the sixth hindrance is white privilege. In summary, if greed, aversion, sloth, restlessness and doubt are what keep us individually from inner peace, and come and go a regular basis because of the nature of the human mind, in the case of racism, white people needing to be or feel good, internalized oppression, blindness to collective suffering, avoiding accountability for impact, battle fatigue, and white privilege keep us from racial harmony, and cumulatively support a steady stream of racism if not interrupted.

As a remedy to these hindrances, King (2018) offers mindfulness practices for cultivating "calm," "kindness," and "clarity" in place of misperception (p. 83; p. 93; p. 105). She underscores the importance of practicing in groups divided by race to support both personal and interpersonal mindfulness practices. According to King (2018),

> There is no shift in consciousness around race without the grit that relating to each other makes possible. However, given the unintended harm caused from unawareness and cumulative impact when we gather across races, we need ... an alternative way, to explore the ignorance and innocence of our racial conditioning and racial character with those of our same race. I recommend racial affinity groups as an ongoing forum for investigating and transforming our individual and collective habits of harm. (p. 165)

King (2018) is not alone in her call for racial affinity groups. Racial affinity groups involve the intentional segregation of individuals, separated by race, to enable those individuals to connect via shared experience and build specific anti-racism skills related to the needs of their racial group before engaging in conversation across race. The emotional labor for people of color and unintended problematic behavior that is the result of white ignorance is predictable, and therefore avoidable, by arranging training and healing grounds with versions of affinity groups in order to build towards forms of desegregation that rely on racially literate and well-practiced white people (King, 2018).

### Resmaa Menakem, Social Work Expert

Menakem (2017) offers his social work knowledge and trauma training to teach forms of mind-body healing for racial justice. Menakem emphasizes that we are going to achieve racial healing and harmony through our bodies first and foremost, and secondarily through the power of culture. So while williams et al. offer change at the Third Space, the intersection of internal mindfulness practice and external conversations, Menakem suggests that transformation occurs at the intersection of body-based practice and culture. Offering a model for thinking about state sanctioned violence, Menakem (2017) writes detailed plans for body-based anti-racism practices that orient towards three bodies: Black, white and police (p. 27). On a related note, Menakem (2017) inserts the word body between white and supremacy, to coin the phrase "white-body-supremacy," emphasizing that the racial healing work we need to do is deeply body-based and trauma-informed (p. 5).

Menakem (2017) outlines the trauma experienced by all three body types, Black-white-police, and expands on the function of trauma between bodies and across generations as "soul wound(ing)" (p. 10). Menakem (2017) spotlights the importance of tending to one specific nerve,

the "soul nerve" (which in anatomy books is known as the vagus nerve); this nerve drives our behavior becauses it manages our fear response that can be both informed by fear in the present-moment or by trauma (p. 5). "White fragility" is a type of fear response coined by DiAngelo (2011) that occurs in white individuals when engaging with a person of color or when discussing the topic of race (as cited in Menakem, 2017). Menakem (2017) deems it important to acknowledge white fragility as a behavior and at the same time to deem it "false," not because white fragility is fake, but because it can be penetrated and replaced with stability (p. 97). With awareness, white people can consciously observe the occurrence of fragility and calm down to make new choices.

**False Fragility, the Hindrances, & Radical Dharma**. Menakem's (2017) idea to face and reframe fragility is supported by the radical dharma Third Space concept which invites us to engage skillfully, to use the part of our mind that can make conscious choices instead of reacting based on fear (williams et al., 2016). King's (2018) hindrances to racial healing also clearly support the notion that fragility must be named and deemed false, and that acts of strength and bravery must be set in place of fragile behavior. Specifically, four hindrances listed by King (2018) address the need for white people to face our own nature, including: our own need to feel or be good, our own blindness to collective suffering, our own tendency to avoid accountability for impact, and our own white privilege.

**Healing Dirty Pain and Building Culture.** To address what he calls "dirty pain,*"* Menakem (2017) offers body-based practices for "settling," "activating," "harmonizing," and "heart mending" that help the body, in particular the soul nerve, address false notions, heal old wounds, and release trauma-trapped energy (p. 19). In addition to body-based practices and

orienting us to clean our pain via affinity groups, Menakem (2017) makes a call for culture creation to ease our physical experience:

> Culture is how our bodies retain and reenact history... Since culture lives in our bodies, it usually trumps everything cognitive (ideas, philosophies, convictions, principles, and laws)...Culture involves elders, rituals, symbols, uniforms, displays, rules, stories, mentoring, roles, titles, awards, codes of behavior, and shared history. (p. 251)

Ultimately, Menakem's call for culture creation is not separate from the body, it is informed by a deep understanding of all that humans do and build to create a semblance of comfort in our impermanent, vulnerable environments.

### Rhonda Magee, Sociologist & Law Professor

Lawyer, professor, sociologist and advocate Rhonda Magee (2019) has been combining mindfulness and racial justice for decades in what she calls "ColorInsight" (p. 24). ColorInsight is a style of facilitating and practicing personal and interpersonal mindfulness, combined with written reflection, to increase racial literacy and build compassion (Magee, 2019). She began developing ColorInsight back in 2003, and has numerous examples of deeply challenging conversations that engage emotion, race, mindfulness, and healing. Magee emphasizes stillness and the resulting wisdom, as key modes of mindfulness to apply towards beginning to feel safe in one's identity and beginning to develop a direct relationship with justice. According to Magee (2019), it is with mindfulness practice that we can counter implicit bias, improve communication, deconstruct whiteness, and become familiar with strong emotions. Like King (2018) and Menakem (2017), Magee (2019) highly recommends affinity groups to develop mindfulness between individuals and across groups. Like williams et al. (2016), Magee highlights bringing our mindfulness practice to conversations about race.

**ColorInsight**. Magee's (2019) techniques are designed to help groups work towards social justice while practicing mindful awareness, facing aversion, and enhancing compassion. The work of ColorInsight is not only providing contemplative tools for social justice work, but also "identifying the particular objectives that need to be addressed to raise our understanding and ability to deal [with] 21st century forms of bias and racism" (Magee, 2016). ColorInsight is intended to address the issue that arises when someone realizes that they desire to be an antiracist advocate, and yet they do not know what steps to take or how to hone their skills. The ColorInsight practices include: "sitting, metta, stories, beholding, and bearing witness" (Magee, 2016). ColorInsight is Magee's (2016) offering to contemplative science, and the world at large, as a form of mindfulness that is community-oriented and community-engaged. Magee works to remind the field that through mindful awareness we can: engage with the present moment with all its discomfort, face aversion, and arrive as a community with greater intimacy and care.

As a Black female academic, Magee (2016) dares to stand in front of her community of predominantly white colleagues and assert, "[we need to] embrace better understand[ing], in particular [of] whiteness" (00:33:31). Magee (2016) uses an example from her work as a law professor to demonstrate one way racism, and bypassing responsibility, operate. She tells the story of how oftentimes white law students are asked by their peers "why are *you* taking that class?" when one of her ColorInsight courses is on their schedule (00:33:53). White people are not expected, nor rewarded, for tending to the concept of race, thus there is a trained aversion to the topic.

Magee (2016) refers to societal norms that, when followed, are rewarded, and when ignored, are punished or at least policed. Her example of white law students being asked in disbelief about their course on race, shows how white people are policed away from taking steps

towards reflecting on their whiteness. Magee (2016) refers to an academic norm that counters social justice efforts, which is the way academic researchers are encouraged to take solo credit for what is in fact collective work. Magee (2016) explains ColorInsight, and how it helps in seeing more clearly the ways we receive "social-emotional support [for] being blind to these issues…[Seeing how] we are rewarded more when we don't know, [and] can't see race" (00:30:54). According to Magee (2016), only when we consider the invitation for greater joy and a thriving heart, can we willingly consider facing the "costs attached to the person who raises the question" of diversity and representation (00:31:16). Only then might we readily face the "training and policing" so deeply ingrained in our society, in our friends, and in our family (00:31:22). Of all the authors of The Canon, Magee is the most outspoken to the research community about the needs for the field to progress.

### Dr. Larry Ward, Religious Studies Theorist

Dr. Larry Ward brings both his doctoral work in religious studies and his decades of direct study with Thich Nhat Hanh to analyzing how racism interacts with karma – the particular concept from Buddhism that is carried over into secular mindfulness through awareness of the impact of our thoughts, words and actions (Ward, 2020). Karmic racial awareness also includes considering the impact of silence and inaction, two contributing factors to systems of racism. Ward (2020) uses the language and frameworks of Buddhist psychology to better understand America's "racialized consciousness" (p. 12). He layers an analysis of racial consciousness atop the "karmic wheel of intention, manifestation, transmission, retribution, and continuation" (Ward, 2020, p. 26). Explaining the power of intention, Ward (2020) describes how intention is necessary to counter habit, including unconscious habits that manifest unless we disrupt them. He finds that, "the manifestation of our unconscious intention gets transmitted outward... and

inward..." (Ward, 2020, p. 28). The "retribution" we experience is a facing of whatever we have set in motion, yet as a "wheel" the reality that has been set in motion can also be halted with intention (Ward, 2020, p. 26). Wards (2020) findings help us to better understand the internal process of mindfulness practice both during individual and interpersonal practice.

Using Buddhist psychology to analyze the topic of intention as intervention, and as a way to initiate healing, Ward (2020) highlights that we can be intentional about all five phases of the karmic wheel. In other words, intention can be used to intervene during the manifestation of thoughts, the transmission of thoughts or emotions, the retribution of those thoughts or emotions, or to pause the momentum that occurs in the continuation phase. For example, Ward (2020) asserts that it is "implanted images" from our culture that are a key component of the transmission of our current racial consciousness (p. 61). Ward (2020) describes three ways of intervening with implanted images by reducing exposure to certain images, by acknowledging the images as they enter the mind, and by introducing new images that counter the message of the less desirable images.

Ward (2020) calls for practicing in community and for "body-centered spiritual practices and training [to] heal the axis of the wheel itself" (p. 82). He proposes community, conversation, and body practices as ways of tending to the "sociological despair," grief and trauma associated with our racial hierarchy (p. 66). From the perspective of Buddhist psychology, he asks: "What human potentials will we nurture, cultivate and reward?...Do we wish to live forever with white supremacy and white fragility?" (Ward, 2020, p. 79). Ward contributes a psychological analysis of racism from the Buddhist perspective, providing language and models for understanding how racism functions once internalized.

***Lama Rod Owens***

Owens (2020) contributes findings that build upon the premise of the "radical dharma five: contemplative, embodied, liberatory, collective, and prophetic" mentioned above (p. 4). As a Black, queer, cisgendered male, Owens (2020) offers both an updated framework called "Adaptive Intersectional Mindfulness" (AIM) as a way of considering personal practice in service of the whole, and a collection of tools he calls "The Seven Homecomings" (p. 7; p. 69). Building atop the rest of The Canon's call to converse in direct interpersonal interactions from a well-practiced mindfulness base, Owens (2020) introduces his model of AIM, outlining the steps individuals can take to guide their practice towards racial healing (King, 2018; Magee, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Owens, 2020; Ward, 2020; williams et al., 2016).

There are seven elements of AIM. The first is to focus intentionally and the second is to then shape solo practice in the service of communal practice. The third element of AIM is that "everything is ours to experience," this is a phrase he uses to activate spaciousness (Owens, 2020, p. 7). Training oneself to produce spaciousness is a key element for being adaptive. Owens (2020) emphasizes, fourth, "divesting from experiences that harm ourselves or others" and, fifth, "reinvesting in helping ourselves to be well" as elements of AIM that direct our resources away from what we do not wish to cultivate and towards that which we wish to see grow (p. 7). In AIM, "self-care" is the sixth element and plays a role as part of "self-preservation" (Owens, 2020, p. 7). Finally, Owens underscores that, to maintain a liberatory nature, mindfulness practices can, and must, "adapt to the needs of the practitioner" (p. 7). Coupled with the radical dharma five, AIM provides steps for orienting one's mindfulness practice towards both the end goal of liberation, and also by practicing the nature of liberation.

In addition to these elements of AIM, Owens (2020) offers "the Seven Homecomings," which are tools practitioners can use when showing up for any one of the seven steps of AIM and when embarking towards contemplative activism (p.69). The tools include: "The Guide, Wisdom Text, Community, Ancestry, Earth, Silence, and Ourselves" (p. 69). Owens refers to The Buddha as "The Guide," highlighting the importance of working with teachers and mentors in Buddhist and secular mindfulness study (Owens, 2020, p. 70). The "Wisdom Text" tool functions similarly to "The Guide" as a resource outside oneself to access direction and perspective (p. 73). "The Ancestors" tool is similar to "The Guide" and "Wisdom Text" as an orientation towards support and the lessons learned from those in our lineage (p. 76). Additionally, Community, Earth, Silence, and Ourselves are tools Owens offers as essential resources for shaping personal practice in service of others. Adaptive Intersectional Mindfulness and The Seven Homecomings work together to support individuals and groups in their contemplative activism.

**Applying Findings from The Canon**

I sees Ward's (2020) use of the karmic wheel, as well as Owens' (2020) elements and tools as ways to understand what it takes to show up at the intersection of personal practice and conversations about race (williams et al., 2016), and at the crossroads of body-based healing and culture (Menakem, 2017). This looks something like an individual with a sphere of influence and a racial identity building a body-based healing practice using mindfulness, and bringing that practice to conversations about race, as well as contributing to the formation of a culture that rewards diversity, belonging, inclusion and equity (King, 2018; Magee, 2019). As the individual contributes in these ways, they have the opportunity to reflect on their karmic wheel of racialized consciousness to become aware of how something is interacting with their fear mechanisms and preconceived notions (Ward, 2020); they may build their ever-strengthening practice using

Owens' AIM to direct their practice in service of the whole; and when in need, they may use one of the seven tools (i.e. homecomings) (Owens, 2020). With tools to reach for, and frameworks to guide the way, it may be possible for individuals and groups to proceed imperfectly towards healing racial injustice.

## The Studies

As stated above, The Canon of Black authors holds authority through experience of Blackness, mindfulness practice, and their respective fields of study. Although not referenced directly in their books, The Canon's theories are supported in various ways by the research of contemplative scientists who are studying topics such as the relationship between mindfulness and prosocial aims, mindfulness and racial healing, and mindfulness for the African American community. While Black and white people are the primary focus populations in this paper, it is worth mentioning that this research is conducted with the intention for intersectional applications and broader communities. One of many examples is a recent study benefitting Asian people that was conducted for improving the race-related stress levels of Asian American college students via mindfulness practice (Hwang & Chan, 2019). The potential for intergroup research on the topic of mindfulness and race is far reaching. In this section, I will explore a select set of six studies whose results contribute to supporting the theories introduced by The Canon via enhancing other-focused compassion, reducing implicit bias, caring for Black people, and beyond.

**Mindfulness for ProSocial Aims: Study 1**

May et al. (2014) researched the prosocial effects of concentration meditation (CM) as compared to lovingkindness meditation (LKM) on college students who were grouped and then taught the particular style CM or LKM. LKM focuses on training the mind to relate with others

via the recitation of phrases of care and visualization of a recipient of that care, while CM is more individual. May et al. (2014) referred to Leppma's (2011) significant findings about LKM "impact[ing] emotional concern, personal distress, perspective taking…" (p. 249). May et al. (2014) recorded the college students' answers to a list of survey questions before meditating "(baseline)," while practicing, and during "withdrawal periods" (p. 251). To measure mindfulness, they used the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory model, which tests for "mindfulness," with two "subscales" that register "acceptance" and "presence" (Walach et al., 2006, as cited in May et al., 2014, pp. 251-252).

The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory is made up of fourteen survey points. Using a separate model "Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)" to measure emotion (Watson et al. 1988, as cited in May et al., 2014, p. 250), they were able to survey participants on ten positive and ten negative "affective states" (p. 252). The researchers launched students into their five week meditation practice periods at varied times and allowed for a varied one-to-three weeks of withdrawal. To determine the results, May et al. deployed "hierarchical linear modeling" (HLM) which allowed them to track the variables per individual and group responses (p. 252) – "HLM [is a technique that] accounts for the shared variance in hierarchically structured data…and accurately estimates lower level slopes (e.g., student level) and their implementation in estimating higher-level outcomes (e.g., classroom level)" (Hofman, 1997 as cited in Woltman et al., 2012, p. 52). May et al.'s use of The Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory, PANAS, and HLM demonstrates ways of layering techniques to account for and measure specific variables when designing mindfulness studies.

Comparing the results of different styles of meditation can be helpful for determining results and potential applications. Recruited college students were divided randomly into two

separate groups to receive either a CM or a LKM audio training. In this particular study, there was not a control group tested without mindfulness input, nor was there a group that received both styles of training. Results were compared directly between CM and LKM styles based on the survey (Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory), measuring emotion (PANAS), tracking duration of results, and noting individual and group trends (HLM). Ultimately, CM practitioners reported "mindfulness" and "acceptance" and "positive affect" via the inventory (May et al., 2014, p. 256), while LKM also reported "mindfulness" and "positive affect." "Presence" and impact on "negative positive affect" showed up uniquely as a result of LKM via the inventory (p. 256). According to May et al. (2014) "there were no differences during and after the meditation period between conditions when directly tested in the combined model" (p. 257). Researchers proposed future research to inquire further about how the two styles, CM and LKM, compare.

While both styles of "meditation-specific models" suggested the development of positive qualities and emotion states while practicing, the key findings from May et al. were that LKM "may induce more enduring changes" (p. 257). Concentration meditation, in this case, did not produce prolonged effects. May et al.'s overview of a number of studies that review the impact of practice time on effects found that there is a range of results that show ways the practice varies by individual. Additional studies, like this one, using hierarchical linear modeling could help to ascertain the impacts of CM and LKM for desired outcomes, and perhaps reveal more about the role of practice duration (May et al., 2014).

Although their research is not on the topic of race, its focus on styles of mindfulness (CM versus LKM) and training the mind to relate with others (intergroup) makes for foundational research for us to build upon, as long as it is emphasized that targeting racism is necessary in future research. May et al. (2014) isolated LKM as a style of meditation that is other-focused

(versus individual-focused) and a style that is at the center of some of the academic studies that have been done specifically on anti-racist applications of mindfulness practice (Kang et al., 2014). May et al. (2014) also do not specifically refer to applying this research to reduce racist beliefs or behavior, but they do refer to applications for the study and reasons for future studies to improve upon their work, including that "presence and acceptance are important components of multiple therapies" (p. 257). Their research on LKM and the emphasis on HLM are potentially valuable for the research being built on the topic of mindfulness and race.

If futures studies continue to build upon the ample literature on mindfulness studies using HLM, then May et al. focus on the benefits of HLM would be significant for this reason alone (Carson et al., 2006; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Jain et al., 2007; Kumar et al., 2008; Short et al., 2010, as cited in May et al., 2014). May et al. highlighted the benefits of HLM for future research since "typical group analyses of the effects of mediation may be suboptimal...HLM has the advantage of appropriately accommodating and analyzing both intra- and inter-individual differences" (p. 257). This tool is potentially helpful for bridging the concept of individual and intergroup studies, and is also likely a way to improve accuracy of studies on mindfulness and race. In addition to spotlighting key options for data collection and analysis within mindfulness studies, May et al. (2014) showed it is possible to look at how individuals respond uniquely to meditation styles and that it is possible to "isolate the comparative effects of different meditation practices" (p. 257). By juxtaposing styles of meditation, surveying emotions, accounting for individual vs. group patterns, as well as duration, May et. al. (2014) were able to measure the impact of their mindfulness intervention and propose future applications.

**Mindfulness for Prosocial Aims: Study 2**

Bankard (2015) analyzed recent studies to conduct research on their hypothesis that mindfulness practice, specifically Lovingkindness Meditation (LKM), could help to address the problem that occurs when human intention, or "moral judgement," does not align with human behavior or decisions (p. 2324). Again, while this study is not specifically on the topic of mindfulness as it applies to racial justice, it is a stepping stone for our research because it isolates and details the benefits of LKM, and why it may be a favored style within mindfulness and race studies (Kang et al., 2014). This study also outlines the role of emotions in decision-making and behavior, which relates to how racism functions. Bankard (2015) highlights a movement in the 1990s when psychologists interested in morality began to consider "affective states," "automatic processing," "emotion," and "intuition," alongside "reasoned calculation," "conscious decision making," and "principle-based argumentation" (p. 2325). This paper benefits from the goal of using meditation to align intention with behavior, and could be used to further study subtle internal mechanisms that uphold racism such as colorblindness, spiritual bypass, white fragility, and implicit bias.

Bankard's (2015) research does not look at race specifically, but instead the topic of translating compassionate intentions into compassionate behaviors. Like King's (2018) example of feeling compassion for, and being able to see, collective harm in addition to individual harm, Bankard's (2015) review illuminates how we might begin to align unconscious and/or emotional responses with preferred decision-making and actions via mindfulness interventions. One of the key findings from Bankard's research is that "moral sentiments must be trained through habituation in order to increase prosocial behavior" (p. 2324); in other words, we do not just do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Doing the right thing requires training, practice and time to embed the behavior as a habit. In addition to training, Bankard found that emotion

cultivation is necessary for consistency in moral decision making, and that LKM does cultivate emotion, specifically other-focused compassion, which contributes towards prosocial behavior and decisions. Referencing key research (Damasio et al., 1991; Damasio et al., 1994; Leiberg, 2011; Lutz et al., 2004; Lutz et al., 2008a; Lutz et al., 2008b; Lutz et al., 2009, as cited in Bankard, 2015), Bankard (2015) built a sound argument for not only the power of mindfulness, specifically LKM, but the necessity of using a tool like LKM to train specific emotions that are required for a desired behavior. In this case Bankard's research underscores the importance of studying applied mindfulness to better see its effects on the brain, as well as targeted areas such as behavior modification for prosocial aims.

**Mindfulness for Racial Healing: Study 3**

Whereas May et al. (2014) measured for LKM's effect on positive states, and Bankard (2015) analyzed the research on mindfulness as a mechanism for behavior change via training other-focused compassion, Kang et al. (2014) contributes to a select type of studies that analyzes the intergroup benefits of mindfulness practice specifically to reduce racism. They tested to see if LKM might impact bias towards "stigmatized groups," "Black" and "homeless" people in particular (p. 1306). Like the other studies, LKM is the selected style of meditation, and this time the Implicit Association Test (IAT) is the key method for gathering and analyzing data.

Kang et al. (2014) used two queries to guide their work that show us how we can think about, and direct additional studies on mindfulness and race. They targeted "reduc[ing] implicit bias" towards "stigmatized group(s)" and whether or not reduced implicit bias towards one group could be "generalizable across multiple stigmatized groups" (Kang et al., 2014, p. 1306). Furthermore, they aimed to determine if it was "cognitive control" or "stress" that was the key "mechanism" contributing to any reduction that did occur (Kang et al., 2014, p. 1307). An

additional observation from Kang et al. was that reduced implicit bias did not result in improved "explicit attitudes," which suggests that future studies could benefit from testing how to link the two (p. 1310). This style of questioning is very valuable for helping us think about interventions that incorporate mindfulness as a tool for racial justice to learn if findings can be universally applied or need to be customized towards specific stigmatized groups, and to learn more about the determining factors for why mindfulness is helpful.

Kang et al. (2014) were inspired by the work of Bargh et al. (2001) and Moskowitz and Ignarri (2009), whose studies "suggest it is possible for people to inhibit implicit bias longer term through the development of automatic goals -- goals that are pursued with sufficient frequency that they become chronically accessible" (p. 1307). This finding aligns with that of Bankard (2015), who emphasized the need for training towards the emotion-based results we seek. Kang et al.'s (2014) research also builds upon the work of Fredrickson et al. (2008), who argued that LKM "may enhance interpersonal connectedness;" Fredrickson et al. (2003), who found that LKM is "associated with adaptive stress coping;" and Carson et al. (2005), whose results showed that LKM "decreases stress." Reviewing the barriers to measuring prejudice, Kang et al. (2014) noted that both options of "self-reporting" and "response-latency techniques" host their own set of issues. Self-reports tend to be impacted by how study participants would like to be perceived, and response-latency techniques are limited by glitches in the tests themselves (IAT; Greenwald et al., 2009).

One of their primary arguments in designing this study is that there is ample space in the field to move beyond studying the individual benefits of mindfulness. Kang et al. (2014) listed examples of the individual benefits research that receives greater funding and support in the field of mindfulness studies, such as "reduction of stress" (Astin, 1997, as cited in Kang et al., 2014,

p. 1306); "anxiety" (Evans et al., 2008, as cited in Kang et al., 2014, p. 1306); "depression" (Teasdale et al., 2000, as cited in Kang et al., 2014, p. 1306); "improvement of mood" (Fredrickson et al., 2008, as cited in Kang et al., 2014, p. 1306); and "even enhancement of academic performance" (Hall, 1999, as cited in Kang et al., 2014 p. 1306). Although individual benefits of mindfulness have garnered the vast majority of support in the field, looking at the interpersonal and cross-group benefits of mindfulness has begun to gain traction and exhibit some promising results (Hutcherson et al., 2008). Kang et al.'s (2014) study design to determine if implicit bias against specific groups can be improved is an example of the direction we can take with advancing support and funding for such research.

**Mindfulness for Racial Healing: Study 4**

Lueke and Gibson (2016) tested to see if mindfulness practice could reduce racist behavior after seeing from their earlier research (2015) that mindfulness in the form of concentration meditation impacts implicit bias by "weakening the associations of the target group with negative constructs" (Lueke & Gibson, 2016, pp. 34-35). Again, this brings us back to the Bankard (2015) subject of moral beliefs versus moral actions. Lueke and Gibson (2016) wanted to study how weakening automatic processing might result in changes in behavior, and they specifically studied this on the topic of race. They prepared white study participants who were about to play a "Trust Game" with either a short mindfulness practice audio or a non-mindfulness audio control (p. 36). The goal of the game was to start with fifty dollars and end up with as many dollars as possible, and if they won the game, participants were told they would win actual money. The way to earn more money was by interacting with photographs of past participants; "participants encountered 150 pictures of interaction partners who varied in ethnicity, one at a time, with presentation order randomly determined for each participant. Each

picture was of a real human face, and the total of 150 faces consisted of 50 White faces, 50 Black faces, and 50 faces of either Asian or Middle Eastern descent" (p. 36-37). Participants were determining with each image if they could trust the face in front of them.

Ultimately, Lueke and Gibson (2016) found that the non-control group that did listen to a mindfulness audio showed greater trust towards the non-white images than the control group, which they registered as a reduction in prejudice (p. 41); meanwhile, they also determined that additional research would be helpful to show a "more direct link that clearly indicates that it is the reduction in implicit bias through mindfulness that causes reduced discrimination" (p. 40). They contrasted their findings with a study they did a year prior (Lueke & Gibson, 2015), as well as the Kang et al.'s (2014) results. While across the board there is a reduction in implicit bias, they highlight the future study possibilities raised by their mixed results. Lueke and Gibson (2016) found that mindfulness reduced bias via "creating a more-objective interaction" (p. 39); Lueke and Gibson (2015) found the mechanism to be "reduced activation of automatic associations" (p. 288); meanwhile, Kang et al. (2014) found "the precise mechanism by which practicing lovingkindness meditation reduced implicit bias toward Blacks (to) remain unclear" (p. 6). Instead of mixed results being problematic, they can help guide research towards future design and controls.

In addition to selecting the IAT for their research, Lueke and Gibson (2015) opted to incorporate "the quad model" from Conrey et al. (2005, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 34) to better understand how a given mechanism individually impacts bias. They built their study on four foundational segments of literature, including (1) research about reduced "negative emotional reactions" due to "less automatic bias" and increased "psychological flexibility" (Fledderus et al., 2010; Lueke & Gibson, 2015; Ostafin & Kassman, 2012, as cited in Lueke &

Gibson, 2016, p. 34); (2) research about reduced "automatic reaction and evaluation" from "cultivating awareness" of internal experiences as "transient mental events" (Bishop et al., 2004, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 34); (3) research about increased "universalism" (Saroglou & Dupuis, 2006, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 34) and reduced "explicit and implicit prejudice" (Clobert et al., 2014, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 34); and, finally, (4) research about "the role of implicit attitudes on discrimination" (Correll et al., 2002; McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Sim et al., 2013; Ziegert & Hanges, 2005, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 40) and "the finding that implicit attitudes are correlated with discrimination on the Trust Game" (Stanley et al., 2011, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016, p. 40). Using the quad model they researched how individual mechanisms may impact bias.

Lueke and Gibson's (2016) study attempted to further the conversation of mindfulness and race by beginning to measure the impact of mindfulness, not only on bias, but on behavior. Their resulting recommendations were to study further if it is possible to "eliminate bias" versus needing to address bias in real time, which considers the way addressing bias while in a real life circumstance may be less ideal. For future studies, Lueke and Gibson (2016) recommend limiting the amount of information that participants have about what is being measured. They also recommend a larger mindfulness input as compared to their short audio recording. Like many researchers, Lueke and Gibson (2016) were sure to note that mindfulness is not for everyone and can, for some unique cases, exacerbate mental health challenges (Shapiro, 1992, as cited in Lueke & Gibson, 2016).

**Mindfulness for African American Communities: Study 5**

Biggers et al. (2020) analyzed the phenomena of bringing mindfulness to Black communities via studying the current literature on the topic. They reviewed mindfulness and

interventions studies between 1990 and 2016 to determine African Americans' participation in mindfulness studies. At the time of the study, "only 24 out of 12,265 citations…were identified as 'diversity-focused'" (p. 2275). Upon searching "trials including MBSR and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) in the USA…African Americans compris[ed] only 11% of participants" (Waldron et al., 2018, as cited in Biggers et al., 2020, p. 2276). There were similarly minimal results, "only five out of 425 trials" registered upon searching, regarding "mind-body therapies (including mindfulness) in cardiovascular disease" for "trials targeting African Americans" (Johnson et al., 2018, as cited in Biggers et al., 2020, p. 2276). First and foremost, Biggers et al. (2020) show how very few studies on mindfulness are intentionally including African Americans; they went on to show how there is reason to believe mindfulness can greatly benefit the African American community.

Biggers et al. (2020) reviewed the key findings from the few studies that did focus on African Americans, mindfulness and positive health outcomes ultimately linking mindfulness with encouraging examples such as "improvement in hypertension and perceived stress" (Johnson et al., 2018, as cited in Biggers et al., 2020, p. 2276) and "reduction in depressive symptoms, reactive cortisol response, and pregnancy-related stress" (Zhang & Emory, 2015, as cited in Biggers et al., 2020, p. 2276). Currently, promotion towards African Americans, and access to mindfulness for African Americans, is extremely minimal. Disparity in health outcomes is one of the major and glaring ways that racism functions. Research trials that recruit a substantial number of African American participants and include culturally relevant modifications could yield results that then increase the number of African Americans who are offered and able to access mindfulness programs for stress reduction (Biggers et al., 2020). Overall, results from this review show: a remarkably low number of studies incorporating

African American participants and measuring benefits to African Americans, and a promising set of positive health outcomes that could be further researched and expanded upon (Biggers et al., 2020).

Since stress is a key health determinant, and African Americans suffer from stress to a great degree, it might be expected that mindfulness, as a proven method that lowers stress, be studied in clinical trials including African Americans, but this is rarely the case due to white supremacy. Preferential treatment towards white people's health outcomes is built in research design. Therefore, the individual benefits from mindfulness that are often celebrated, including stress reduction, are in direct and indirect ways not reaped by the African American community – in 2019, not even 1% of over 1,500 clinical trials that were affiliated with mindfulness were specifically designed to benefit African Americans (NIH Clinical Trials, 2019, as cited in Biggers et al., 2020). The minimal research to date focused on African Americans is only a piece of the puzzle. Biggers et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of increasing clinical trials that include African Americans, as well as the necessity of including culturally relevant modifications to research plans for implementation.

**Mindfulness for African American Communities: Study 6**

Like this thesis, Woods-Giscombe and Black's (2014) study of mindfulness interventions to improve health outcomes for African American women is a theoretical analysis of the potential benefits to leveraging current vast empirical research and clinical trials towards the, all too minimized, applications for mindfulness to reduce racism and the results of racism (such as poor health outcomes for Black people). They perform a literature review of studies on the topics of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Lovingkindness Meditation (LKM), and NTU (pronounced ''in too'') Psychotherapy (NTU). NTU is a culturally sensitive intervention that

originates from the Bantu people of Central Africa. It refers to "the universal and unifying vital life force and spiritual essence at the core of all physical existence" (Phillips, 1990 as cited in Woods-Giscombe and Black, 2014, p. 124). According to Woods-Giscombe and Black, "African American women's unique stress experiences as a result of…sociohistorical and cultural experiences related to race and gender potentially widen exposure to stressors and influence stress responses and coping behaviors" (p. 115). For African American women, stress is the result of a unique formula of combined "'strength' (vis-à-vis resilience, fortitude, and self-sufficiency)" plus "emergent health-compromising behaviors related to strength (e.g., emotional suppression, extraordinary caregiving, and self-care postponement)" (p. 115). Increasing studies on the individual benefits of mindfulness practice with Black subjects could improve both access to and quality of programs offered for Black healthcare patients when taking into account their specific stressors and relationship with strength (Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2014).

In particular, Woods-Giscombe and Black (2014) found that the benefits of "self-awareness, self-care, and inter- and intrapersonal restorative healing" may arise from mindfulness (p. 116). They added that "a redefinition of inner strength" may be developed by combining mindfulness practices, specifically MBSR, LKM, and with NTU (p. 116). The contribution of Woods-Giscombe and Black (2014) is not only a culturally relevant mind-body practice (NTU) to include alongside forms of mindfulness, but also of note is the idea that perhaps instead of putting styles of meditation in competition with one another, in some cases it might be ideal to research what occurs when combining styles.

Instead of identifying which mindfulness practice performs best in testing, Woods-Giscombe and Black (2014) theorized about how to combine two mindfulness practices and one culturally specific mind-body practice to yield the ideal combination of benefits. They

highlighted the benefits of MBSR, LKM, and NTU when combined: "MBSR… to cultivate a meditation practice, develop non-judgmental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors...LKM [for] nurturing compassionate relationships with others, cultivating virtues such as forgiveness..., and generating emotions that result in self-love and self-care" (p. 126). Woods-Giscombe and Black proposed MBSR for practice and LKM for other-focused compassion training, and then "the NTU therapeutic framework" which incorporates a therapist "could be used to help individuals process and work through cultural, historical, familial, psychosocial, and individual factors that could either impede or promote holistic well-being" (p. 126). Together, Woods-Giscombe and Black suggested that these three styles offer unique, and complimentary, benefits for healing and integration, and if studied, could produce improved health outcomes for African Americans.

Ongoing studies of the benefits of mindfulness practice are clearly in demand. An important question that Woods-Giscombe and Black (2014) addressed is how does race and gender, plus related expectations, impact the need for mindfulness practice, access to such programs, and the way interventions might coincide to provide the best treatment protocol. This research contributes to a small but mighty category of research on the topic of mindfulness and race. "The MBSR, LKM, and NTU interventions have clear theoretical relevance for stress- and strength-related health disparity risk among African American women...with the most empirical support," and Woods-Giscombe and Black point out that, although the research shows these methods could be beneficial for this specific population, it is important to also survey the population to learn if the "interventions are acceptable" (Betancourt, 2006, as cited in Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2014, p. 126). As we begin to apply the strengths of our field to intergroup research and reparative research that addresses societal harm done due to our historical and

present racist structures, like Woods-Giscombe and Black's (2014) research, in some cases, it will not be intergroup research but individual-benefit-research for stigmatized groups that will also best express the true ethics of the field of mindfulness studies (Biggers et al., 2020; Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2014).

**Directions and Implications for Future Research**

Mindfulness, now a popularized concept, is both a falsely obvious go-to tool for racial justice and a true instrument with great potential. To access the true and great potential for mindfulness to be used as a tool for racial justice, directions for future research need to include: acknowledging the current work that is being done on the subject; increasing the number, and quality, of intergroup studies focused on practicing mindfulness to address bias and discriminatory behavior; and increasing the number and quality (including cultural adaptations) of studies with consenting Black subjects for the individual, life-changing, and stress-relieving benefits of mindfulness. Additionally, future research in the field could benefit from measuring annual ratios regarding (1) application submissions by topic and (2) funding allocations: individual versus intergroup mindfulness, general studies versus pro-Black cultivation, and studies to individually benefit white people versus studies to individually benefit Black people.

This literature review has also identified a set of tools for measuring mindfulness to provide a possible starting point for the design of future research. The literature reviewed in this thesis utilized some of the prominent ways bias and mindfulness are measured, among others, including: the Implicit Association Test (IAT) results tracked before and after a mindfulness intervention (Kang et al., 2014), and surveys either custom-made or replicable such as the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Walach et al., 2006, as cited in May et al., 2014). Additional tools such as the "Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)" can be used to measure

emotion (Watson et al., 1988, as cited in May et al., 2014, p. 250). While this list is not exhaustive, it provides a sense of the range of measurement tools for designing additional studies.

Once data is collected, there are various options for how data can be analyzed, allowing researchers to gather more than one datapoint from their study. One method from the literature, for example, can track variables such as individual responses alongside group responses –- Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) (May et al., 2014, p. 250). The literature also showed another model, which can be used in tandem with the Implicit Association Test, "the quad model" from Conrey et al. (2005), that breaks down which variables are contributing to implicit bias (p. 470). Both PANAS and the quad model are examples of tools that allow researchers to get very granular. For example, researchers can potentially study not only how meditation impacts decisions, or implicit bias, but also which styles of meditation do so more effectively and even which aspects of the meditation style are the key component (i.e., mechanism).

Specific results from the studies that apply to directions and implications for future research include: the necessity of using a style of meditation like LKM to train specific emotions that are required for desired behavior (Bankard, 2015); styles of questioning to learn about interventions and key determining factors (Kang et al., 2014); and finally, further study of how to reduce bias, and at what point the reduction in bias might be most beneficial (Lueke and Gibson, 2016). In other words, it may be possible to study the invisible and unconscious variables that impact and uphold racist beliefs and behavior, if only we face the nature of implicit bias long enough to see that it has been limiting our attention to the value and benefit of such research. I hypothesize that the implications for this suggested future research are that when white contemplative scientist, Western Buddhist, and secular mindfulness communities alike commit to

internally and continually addressing colorblindness, implicit bias, white fragility and spiritual bypass, there will be the opportunity for racial literacy to increase in those spaces and for a compassion that is racially aware to be built. When, and if, these communities, the ones that are already presumed to be racially aware via their association to compassion, begin to do our work, we can benefit broader liberal and progressive communities where the same systems have continued to maintain hold and where mindfulness has yet to be utilized.

## Conclusion

My findings show that The Canon's models can be used in tandem and that these authors, and other Black academics, are due sizeable professional acknowledgement for their contributions. Also, findings show that mindfulness studies as a field has pre-existing methods and measurement tools to work with, and build upon, for intergroup research if only we move beyond the hyperfocus on the individual benefits of mindfulness, which are overly researched and overly committed to white populations. Results suggest that for racial justice there is an interconnection between intergroup research, studies for racial healing, and studies safely incorporating the needs and participation of Black participants, as well as intersectional applications across races and stigmatized groups. The studies demonstrate that contemplative scientists can in fact specifically test and analyze particular styles of mindfulness, as well as isolate intervening mechanisms to target, for example, bias versus discrimination or to understand if it is reduced stress or reduced automatic association causing behavior change. Mindfulness is an intervention that can be studied and practiced more thoroughly to later inform racial justice training and to achieve further progress.

There are two parallel takeaways from the research gathered for this thesis. First, this research serves as a call to action for acknowledgement of and increased involvement of

contemplative scientists and practitioners in use of mindfulness practice(s) for anti-racist aims, with a particular emphasis on including and celebrating Black researchers/practitioners. Second, this thesis offers the collection of work from The Canon to serve as a how-to guide for those who have already heard the call and are seeking clarity and tools for how to further racial justice in their communities. The findings from the research show that mindfulness, with updated application, ongoing study, and most importantly, ongoing practice, could, if started now, begin to bear the fruit of racial justice in households, schools, cities, and organizations in generations to come.

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